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HOW CORONA BECAME AN INFODEMIC

MAPPING MISINFORMATION ON COVID-19

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Information

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The report is published April 2020.

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KEY FINDINGS

The coronavirus pandemic has been accompanied by an *infodemic* of misinformation. The infodemic can weaken the confidence in global health authorities and reduce the governments' effort to combat the spread of the virus. Ultimately, the infodemic could cost lives.

Therefore, we must fight misinformation on coronavirus, and the fight begins with understanding how and why misinformation spreads.

This report contains an analysis based on more than 6 million data observations related to misinformation and information from sources with low credibility on social media across languages.

The conclusions are:

- Misinformation on coronavirus began with a few limited conspiracies that were spread through fringe sites outside the mainstream.
- Quickly, misinformation was spread to several languages and became an infodemic that also entered the mainstream sites on social media.
- The spread of misinformation often occurs as part of an argument on specific political views or health related issues, which already has a large audience on social media. This way of being integrated into existing views and issues could partly explain the efficiency of spreading.
- Political support groups, conspiracy theorists, alternative news pages and tabloid media sites actively use the massive interest in the Coronavirus to attract attention.
- The misinformation 'ecosystem' of each language and country varies, and these national and linguistic characteristics must be considered in order to understand how misinformation spreads online.
- Italy was the country that was hit the hardest by coronavirus at the time of our data collection, and Italians were most likely to engage with misinformation and information from low credibility sources.
- The harder we are hit by a catastrophe like a pandemic, the more likely we become to interact with misinformation – and thus, the more effective misinformation becomes.

Based on these conclusions, the report recommends governments to:

- Assume responsibility for fighting misinformation and integrate it into the overall fight against coronavirus.
- Fight misinformation by targeting two problems:
    - The actual spread of misinformation on specific platforms
    - The underlying causes making people more likely to trust misinformation

The report proposes several specific initiatives as to how this can be carried out.

THE STUDY

By early March 2020, the coronavirus pandemic gave rise to an infodemic of misinformation spreading quickly on the major social media platforms and in different languages. Despite extensive efforts of social media companies and to some extent governments, misinformation spread exponentially through mid-March and the tendency has not yet been reversed.

METHOD

We set out to investigate how misinformation spreads globally and to find explanations that could help us understand how misinformation was spread. We wanted to understand how the individual cases of misinformation were spread – but more interestingly, how pieces of misinformation slipped into the news stream on the social media. Also, we wanted to examine if misinformation grew in countries that were early victims of coronavirus with the aim of allowing other countries to prepare themselves for a future surge.

We took a point of departure in 136 domains that the independent news organization and Internet Trust Tool NewsGuard (https://www.newsguardtech.com) has registered in the U.S, the U.K., France, Italy, Germany and the Netherlands as delivering misinformation on coronavirus and having a low credibility. We then sourced all social media posts from Facebook and Twitter that linked to those pages and contained coronavirus related words such as 'covid' and 'corona' in the posted texts or link titles.

We sourced data from the period between January 1 and April 1, which resulted in a data set of 67.840 posts from 18.568 different actors. Combined, the posts have more than 6 million interactions.

67.840 unique posts

18.568 actors

6.188.988 interactions (shares & likes)

Our data shows that while social media companies are making efforts to combat misinformation, there are still substantial amounts being spread on platforms like Facebook and Twitter.

We used an algorithm that detects language on our dataset, and it gave us the possibility of sorting posts by language and defining certain characteristics in the types of pages and narratives in the posts. We qualitatively analyzed the posts in four languages: English, Italian, French and German. On social media, the language spoken does not always correspond to the country where it is spoken (and many languages are spoken in more than one country), but we are confident to state that the content written in each language corresponds roughly to the countries of U.S., Italy, France and Germany.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY 'MISINFORMATION'?

MIS-INFORMATION
is defined as materially false information on a certain topic

Our data contains posts that share links from the 136 sites – which according to NewsGuard – have published 'materially false information about the virus', have a low credibility and contain key words related to coronavirus. This does not mean that every single post in our data is an example of misinformation, rather that every single post in our data is a potential piece of misinformation in a news stream where misinformation has occurred. Consequently, in this report, "the general spread of coronavirus misinformation" is regarded as posts that come from sites with a low credibility and contain key words related to coronavirus based on NewsGuard's defintion.

We took this approach because once misinformation spreads from beyond the site where it originates (often small, obscure fringe sites) to larger sites with low credibility, misinformation often becomes part of the news stream and it becomes difficult to distinguish between misinformation, information based on sources with low credibility and reliable information. The three elements may even appear in the same feed.

Given our data set, there are two things that should be kept in mind. Our report maps misinformation in a number of different languages, however, it does not show the totality of misinformation globally. Besides, we did not analyze the specific role of commercial or state sponsored actors.

FROM EPIDEMIC TO INFODEMIC

We have mapped the spread of coronavirus misinformation over three different accumulated periods:

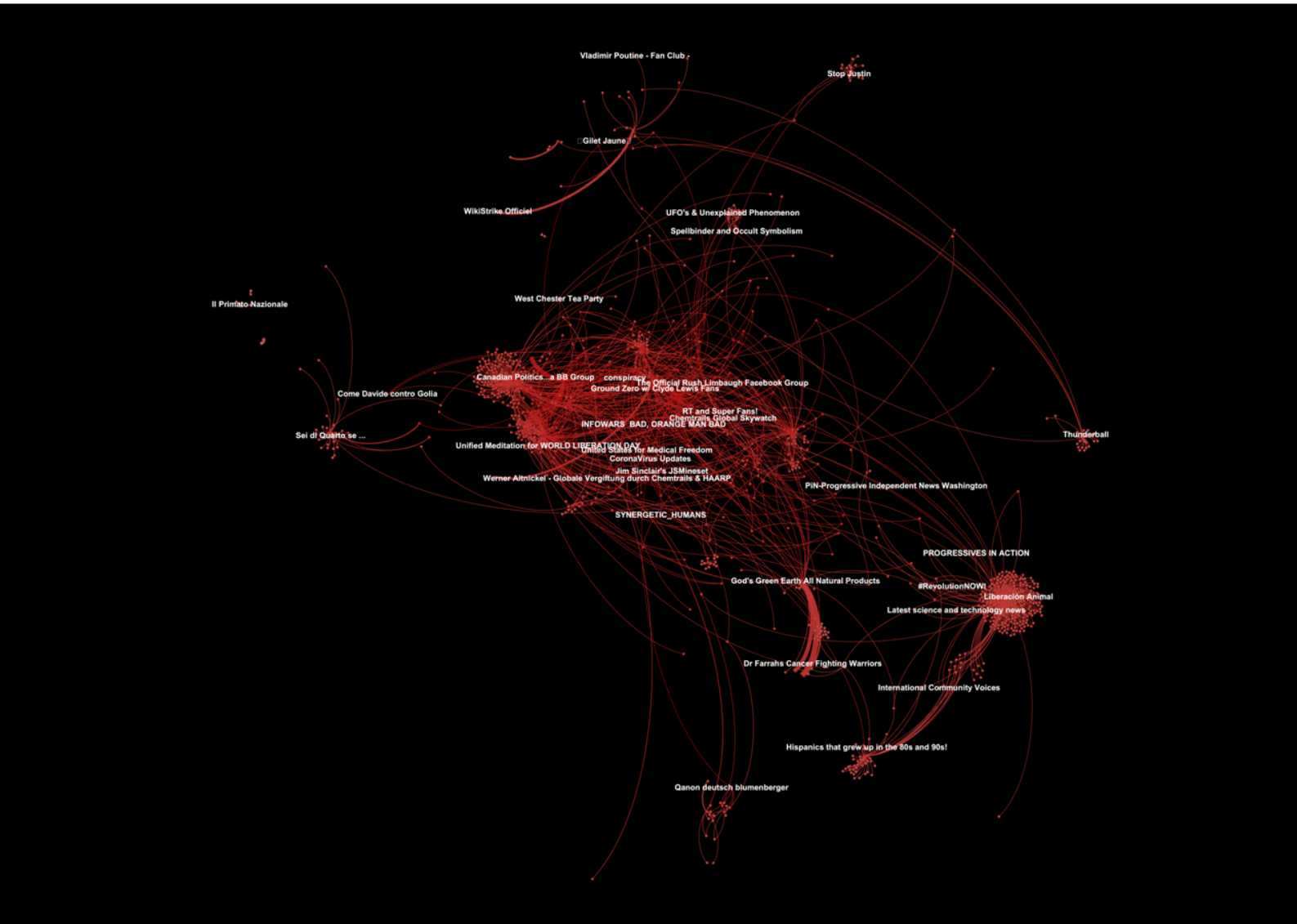
PHASE 1: THE FRINGE EPICENTER

January 1 to February 1

In the first phase, misinformation is spread almost exclusively by pages in English with a few Italian, French and German exceptions. It begins with several conspiracy theories and highly dubious explanations on the origin and spread of the coronavirus. The conspiracies spread in this phase in January are:

- Coronavirus is man-made and spreads so pharmaceutical companies can sell vaccines.
- The Gates Foundation is behind the fabrication of the coronavirus.
- Coronavirus is man-made as a biological weapon.
- Coronavirus escaped from a lab that was working on it in Wuhan.

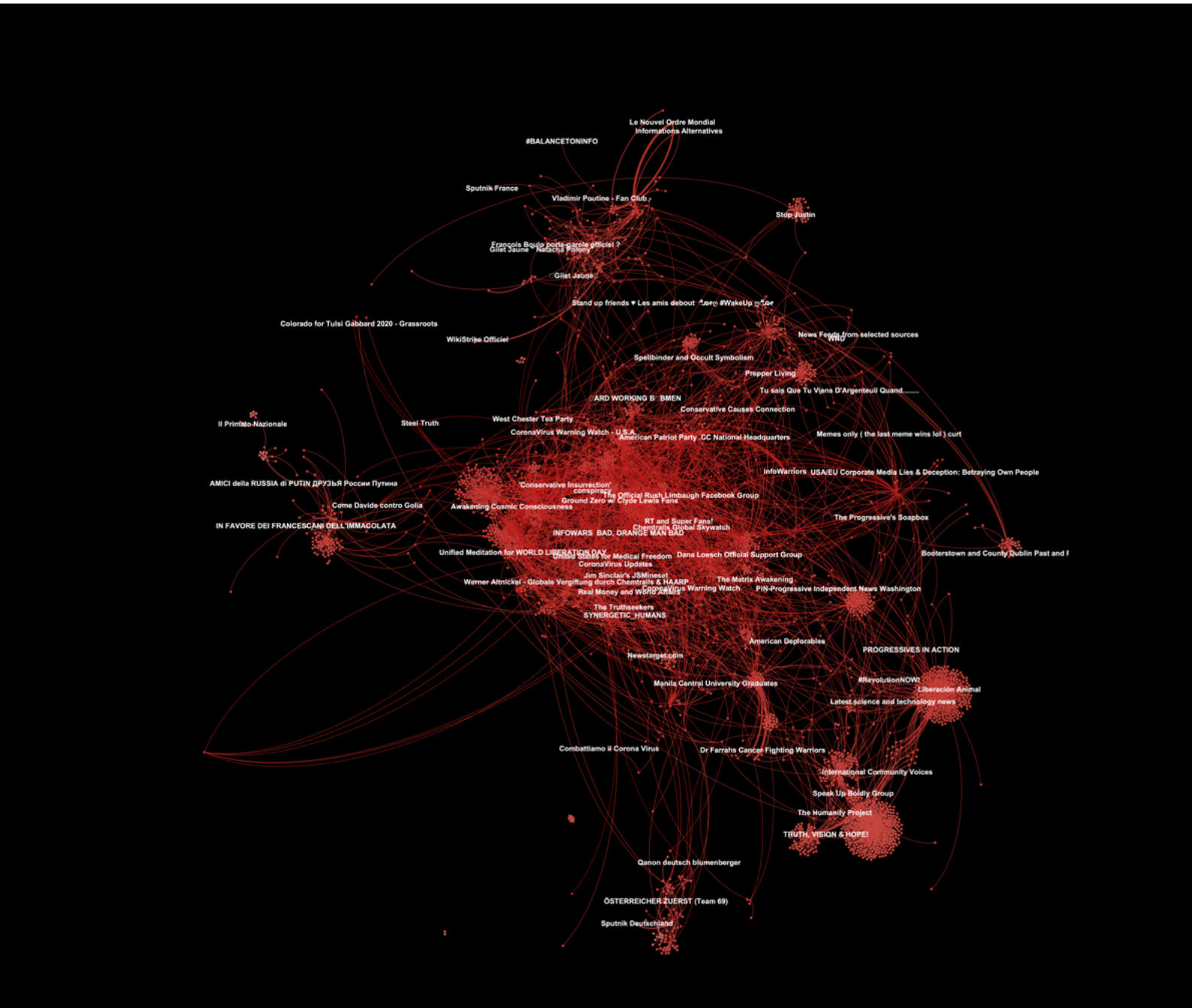
By February 1, most of the pages in the center of the network are political pages, conspiracy pages and alternative medicine pages – all pages outside the mainstream.



PHASE 2: SPREAD TO OTHER LANGUAGES

February 1 to March 1

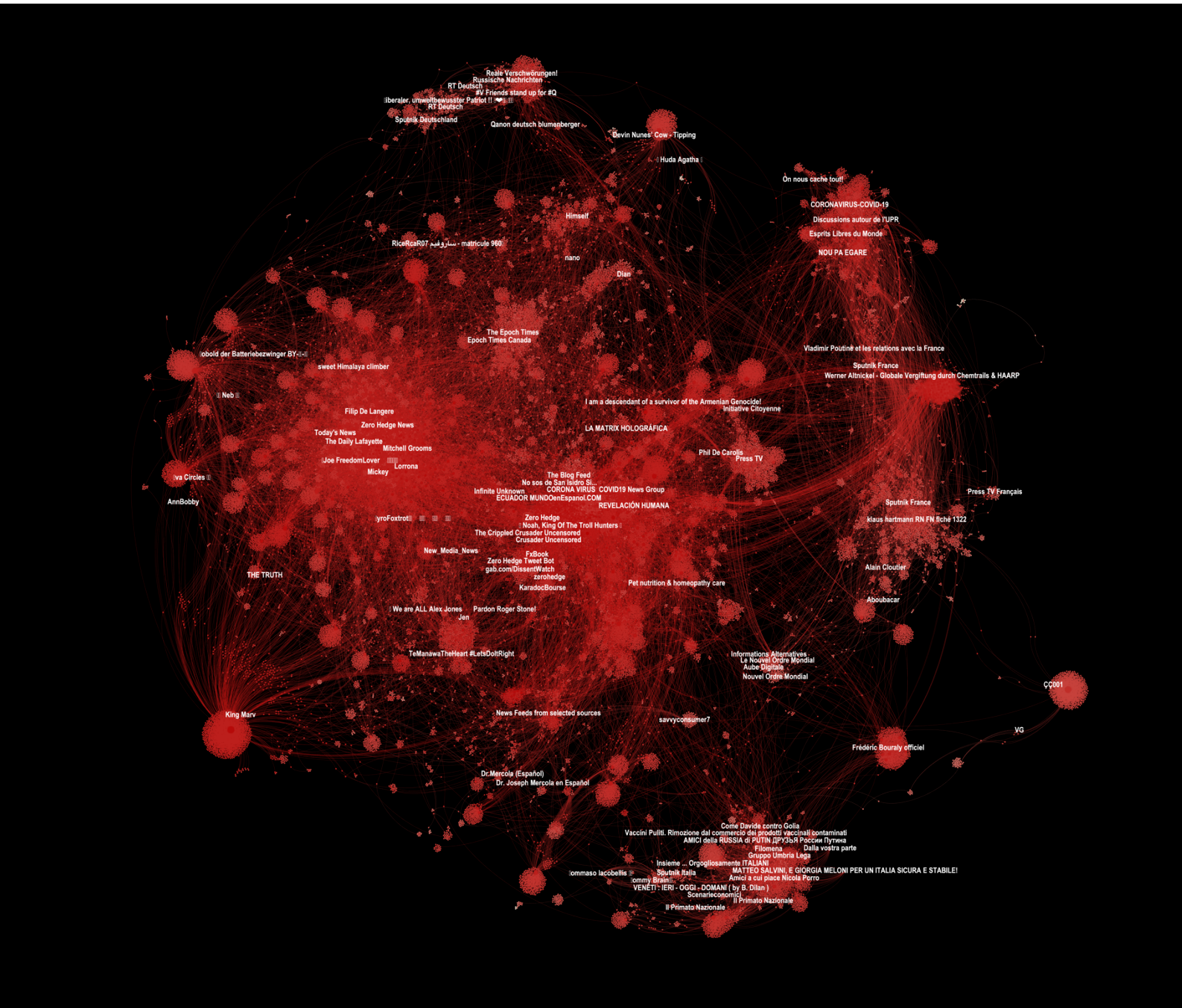
In the second phase, the network of misinformation spreads out to more pages in non-English speaking languages and several more consolidated isles appear in the network. This coincides with a substantially increased coronavirus related activity at the end of February.



PHASE 3: A GLOBAL INFODEMIC

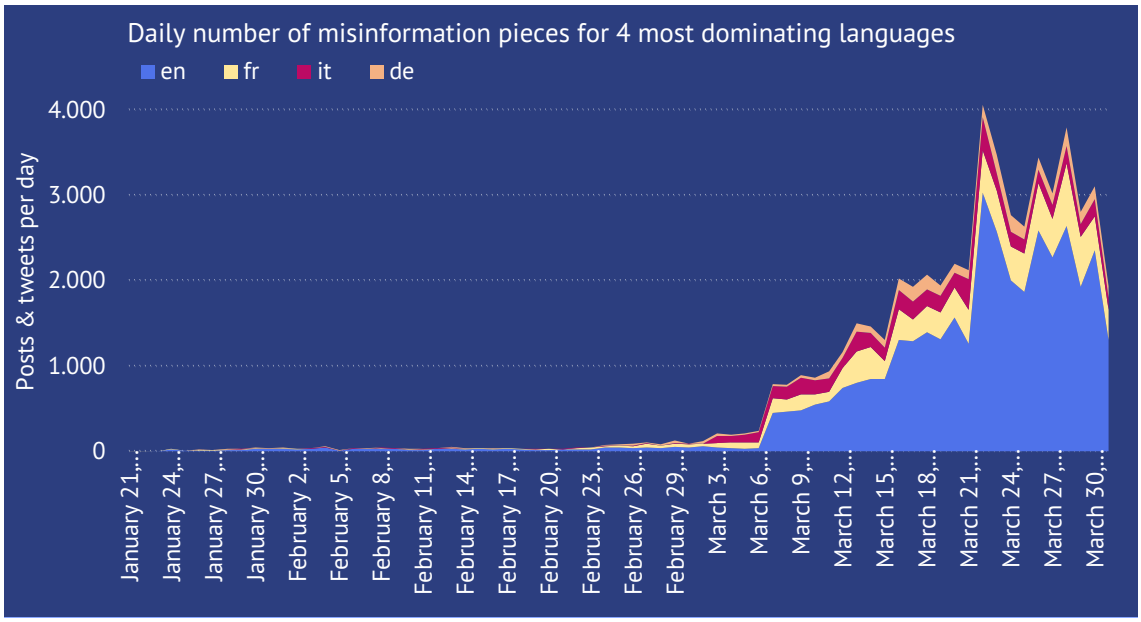
March 1 to April 1

In the third phase, the spread has developed to the point, where it could be called an infodemic and thus reflects the development in the spread of the actual virus and the accordingly media attention. The number of posts, interactions and pages involved in spreading misinformation has - intentionally or by accident - reached a point where getting an overview of it becomes difficult.

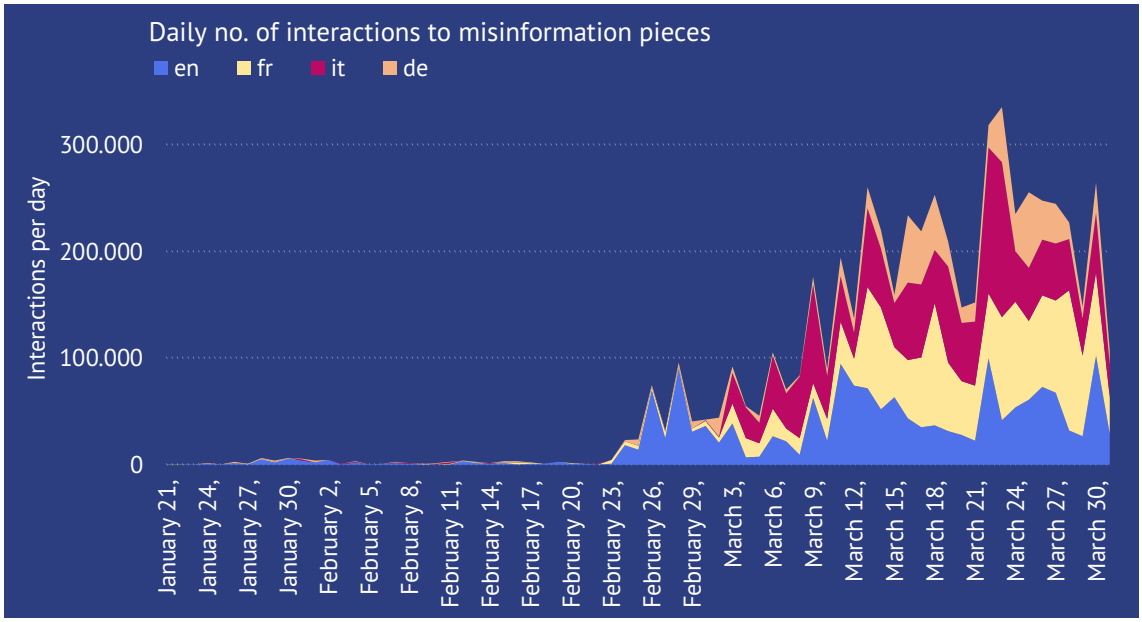


MISINFORMATION INCREASES WITH THE ACTUAL CRISES

The below graph shows the daily number of posts and tweets potentially containing misinformation on coronavirus. The number of misinformation pieces grew quickly, as the pandemic itself, and evolved into an infodemic through March. This could indicate that any crisis that gets the attention of the media, could lead to an upsurge in misinformation.



While the level of posts remains high throughout March, the level of interactions peaks by the third week and then drops. Interactions can broadly be translated into how willing people are to engage with content. The drop could indicate that people have become more aware of misinformation, that the measures of many governments have provided some of the answers, people were looking for in the misinformation or that social media companies have tackled misinformation effectively.



PLATFORMS & ACTORS

MISINFORMATION IS SPREAD EQUALLY ON FACEBOOK & TWITTER SPREAD

Of all the content shared from the 136 pages, Twitter accounts for 52% and Facebook for 48 % (29% from pages and 19% from groups). It may surprise that misinformation is shared equally on Facebook and Twitter given the former's extensive moderation efforts and available resources. This could be due to the amount of posts on Facebook in general.

That there is an overweight of conspiracy related misinformation on coronavirus among the most re-tweeted tweets on Twitter could be because the moderation is less intensive. The following tweets were all in the top 20 of the most re-tweeted:

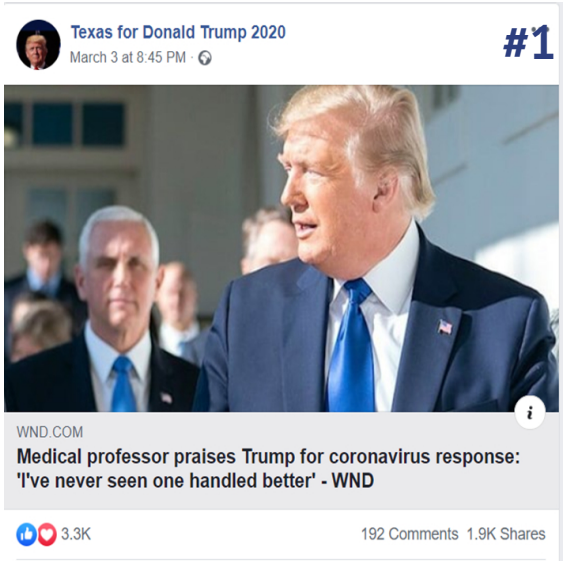
- Why does Corona keep infecting elites? BTW... a medical Corona researcher says it came from snakes. 👀 https://t.co/TFcQm4ScW0 Why does Corona keep infecting elites?
- Not only do I think this is a bunch of bull, but I would not be at all surprised if China and their globalists partners did this all on purpose to hurt @realDonaldTrump. Change my mind. #CoronavirusPandemic #Covid_19 #COVD19 https://t.co/N83yp9CQJe
- Dr. Francis Boyle, an advocate against the development and use of bioweapons, suspects COVID-19 is a weaponized pathogen that escaped from Wuhan City's Biosafety Level 4 facility, which was specifically set up to research coronaviruses and SARS. https://t.co/SGvnENRq7W
- CIA-Mockingbird MSM PROPAGANDA continues to try to DERAIL THE TRUMP TRAIN!!!! NBC Op-Ed Blames U.S. Freedom, Praises Communist China Over COVID-19 Response! https://t.co/n3Bu4A2dD9 #MAGA #Trump #Mighty200 #TWGRP #Qanon
- If China's pointing the finger @ the US, then chances are good there was nefarious intent behind the Chinese WuFlu virus. 'US Army Behind Covid-19 In Wuhan': China's Foreign Ministry Levels Bombastic Charge | Zero Hedge https://t.co/gZeMSYbwrX
- Según el experto en armas biológicas Francis Boyle, la evidencia sugiere que el COVID-19 podría ser un coronavirus creado como arma biológica>>> https://t.co/j6eAHiBNhh #españolmercola

FOUR TYPES OF PAGES SPREAD MISINFORMATION GLOBALLY

We have looked at what type of pages had the most 'successful' misinformation posts – that is, posts that were most widely shared and therefore contributed significantly to the spread of misinformation. Four types of pages stand out.

1. Political pages

A piece of misinformation or an incorrect news story is used to garner political support for a known cause or politician (or protect from criticism). This type of posts plays a part in a political narrative more than it informs the discussion on coronavirus. Several support pages (officially affiliated or not) for individuals and in particular the US politicians (Trump, Pence) used coronavirus content very actively and this type of "promotion" is also found in Italy (Salvini).



Misinformation is used to garner political support for a known cause. This type of content plays a part in a political narrative more than it informs discussions on coronavirus

Also, several anti-immigration pages have used coronavirus misinformation to further their narratives on the danger that immigrants and lax immigration policies pose.

On both types of political pages, the misinformation is subsumed under the political narrative and caters to the cognitive or confirmation bias of people making it more likely that they will believe it (see for instance Michael Shermer's *The Political Brain*, 2006). In other words, the effectiveness on these pages is related to the fact that we all share a well described tendency to fit new information into our already existing world views rather than let it challenge those views. Accordingly, if misinformation is coherent with our already existing views, we will be more likely to accept it as true.

Anti-immigration pages also use coronavirus misinformation to further their narratives on the danger that immigrants and lax immigration policies pose

2. Alternative 'health' pages

Alternative 'health' pages typically mistrust conventional science and medicine and are dedicated to alternative treatment forms – often herbs, 'natural' treatments and dietary changes. They distrust recognized treatments and methods (x-rays, vaccinations, chemo, prescription medications etc.). Here, the coronavirus misinformation is brought into a narrative, where the alternative approach is trying to show how conventional medicine and science are covering the 'truth' (or uncapable of seeing it) and in this sense, they share some characteristics with conspiracy pages. Typical examples of the alternative 'health' pages are: Dr. Mercola, Dr. Mercoal en Espanol, GreenMedInfo, The Truth About Cancer, Erin at Health Nut News, Health Impact News, Coconot Health, Cancer Truth, Raw Food Revolution, National Vaccine Inform, Collective Evolution, L'anthi-mythe vaccinal.

Audiences of alternative health pages are likely to accept misinformation as true, as they already distrust established scientific definitions of true and false knowledge

The coronavirus misinformation is subsumed the larger battle between conventional-alternative and therefore also caters to people's distrust in authorities. The audiences of these pages could be more likely to accept the misinformation as true, because they already distrust established scientific definitions of true and false knowledge.

3. Conspiracy pages

Conspiracy pages seek to demask the world as it really is, which is covered up by authorities (the 'Deep State'), Big Business or a specific interests (5G) etc. The coronavirus misinformation is typically used as a proof in the picture of this larger cover-up. The conspiracy pages present worldviews that are so far from what we would characterize as conventional or established knowledge that their theories on coronavirus seem travesty-like. However, this fits with the typical content on these pages, and conspiracy narratives tend to creep into mainstream over time (anti-vaccination, anti 5G). Examples of these type of pages are: Conspiracy, The Mind Unleashed, Chemtrails, Réseau International, Augen Auf, Für Aufgewachte.

Coronavirus misinformation is typically used as a proof in the picture of a larger cover-up.

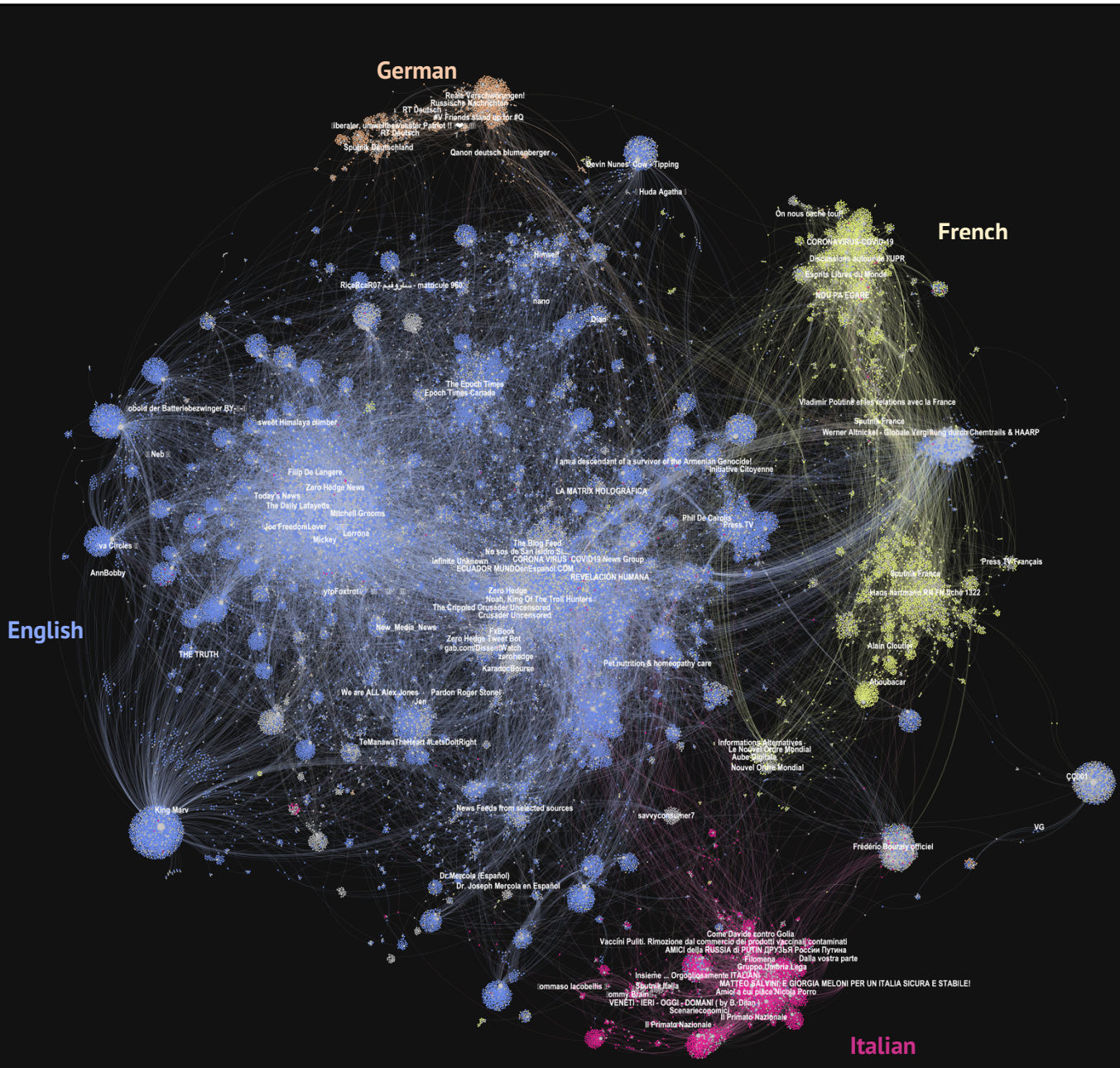
4. Tabloid pages

These news sites attract audiences through exaggerated headlines and entertainment. The Corona misinformation is used to generate clicks and thus revenue and is in other words subsumed the commercial interests of the company. In Italy for instance, Caffeina has 3 million followers and it often had entertainment related content, gossip and stories on coronavirus. In January, it published a post claiming that coronavirus was made in a Chinese lab. In the example below, the headline promises to state when the pandemic is over but the article itself does not quite do so.

LANGUAGES & MISINFORMATION

ENGLISH DOMINATES, FRENCH & ITALIAN COME IN SECOND & THIRD

Misinformation from the 136 pages is spreading globally from language to language but in varying degree and intensity. Our mapping shows that English constitutes the core language of the misinformation posts, but French, Italian, German, Spanish and Japanese also emerge as languages with separate ecosystems of misinformation on coronavirus. That Spanish only plays a minor role is probably because there were few Spanish pages among the original 136 to begin with.



As the below table shows, by far most of the posts are written in English, and many of them have specific U.S. related content (US politicians and issues). It is quite likely that English overall dominates but it is also because there were most pages in English to begin with. However, a lot of the posts are also found translated into other languages.

There is roughly one fourth French posts and one eight Italian posts compared to the number of total posts in English. Posts in Italian, however, receive almost seven times as many interactions (likes and shares) as posts in English and more than twice as many as the posts in French. Potentially, this means that misinformation is seven times more effective in Italy than in the US. This may be due to the fact that Italy at the time of data collection was hit extremely hard by the coronavirus and this may have provoked very strong feelings making people more likely to react and interact with content.

Language top 10		Total number of interactions	Number of posts and tweets with COVID-19 related links low credibility sources	Interaction per piece of misinformation
1	fr	1702648	9956	171
2	en	1700211	38069	45
3	it	1644445	5320	309
4	de	707686	3494	203
5	es	73465	701	105
6	pt	27150	270	101
7	lt	9321	15	621
8	vi	3763	30	125
9	ja	3331	894	4
10	ro	3088	90	34

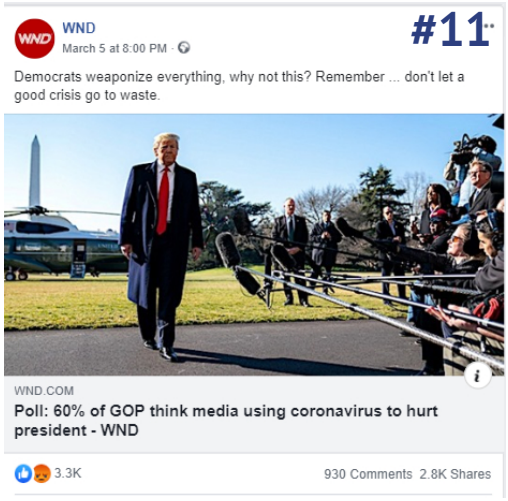
The earlier described four types of pages (political, alternative 'health', conspiracy and tabloid) are present in the U.S, France, Germany and Italy and potentially provide a framework for understanding the spread of misinformation in other countries. However, there are also national differences in the four countries that set them apart individually and the narratives and dominant type of pages vary from country to country.

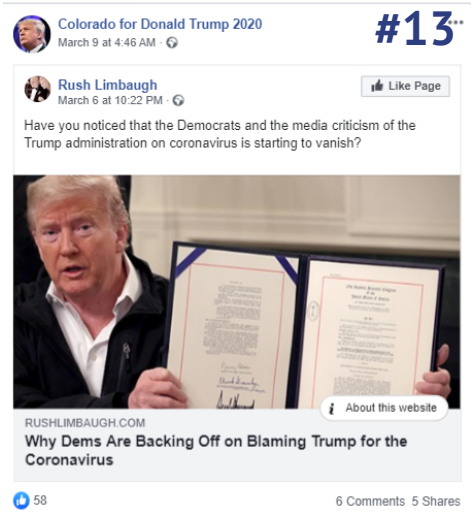
UNITED STATES: PARTISAN POLITICS AND ALTERNATIVE HEALTH

Misinformation and the spread of news with low credibility in the U.S. has two characteristics that stand out in comparison to Italy, France and Germany.

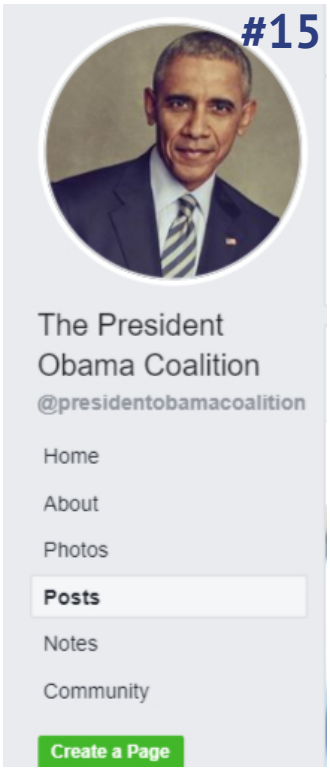
Coronavirus is being politized and used in the partisan domestic political fight.

There are a number of Donald Trump support pages (to what extent they are officially affiliated has not been possible to determine) that contribute to the spread of misinformation and/or very low credibility news stories on coronavirus. Individually, these pages do not have extensive reach in a U.S. context, but taken together, they have several million followers. One narrative sticks out: Democrats have 'weaponized' the issue to further their own gains.





In the data set, there were very few open Democratic support pages, but one was found. It was a support page for Obama (its affiliation was not possible to establish) and Democratic politics more broadly. It used the coronavirus to claim that Trump is willing to let millions of Americans die to deal with his own political crisis.



Alternative health pages play a prominent role in spreading misinformation

The alternative health pages are numerous and several of them have more than a million followers, making them an important part of the spread of misinformation. They have posted statements about vitamin C being an effective cure for coronavirus, but also the conspiracy theory that the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation was responsible for the coronavirus outbreak. A possible reason why these pages are so prevalent in the U.S. and not in Europe probably has to do with the latter's stricter marketing laws concerning health products.

#16

Health Impact News
January 26 ·

Did Bill Gates & World Economic Forum Predict Coronavirus Outbreak? Will There be an Internet Blackout to Control Information?

In this report we take an inside look at Event 201, which took place in NYC on October 18 2019. Event 201 is a high-level pandemic exercise hosted by the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security in partnership with the World Economic Forum and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

This is extremely fascinating because this pandemic simulation exercise of coronavirus took place about 6 weeks before the first illness from the coronavirus was actually reported in Wuhan China!

That is one hell of a coincidence if you believe in that sort of thing. Another fascinating connection, is the fact that not only did the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation participate in and help set up the pandemic simulation of a coronavirus outbreak, but they just so happen to fund the group who owns the patent to the deadly coronavirus and are already working on a vaccine to solve the current crisis. Again an incredible coincidence…

In this report you will see footage from inside the event as the members of the emergency epidemic board in this simulation, which consists of representatives from major banks, the UN, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Johnson and Johnson, logistical powerhouses, the media as well as officials from China and America's CDC just to name a few.

This simulation also includes news reports that were fabricated just for this exercise, please keep that in mind because they are eerily similar to reports we are currently seeing regarding this real world coronavirus outbreak.

Read the full story here: https://healthimpactnews.com/…/did-bill-gates-world-economn…/

HEALTHIMPACTNEWS.COM
Did Bill Gates & World Economic Forum Predict Coronavirus Outbreak? Will There be an Internet Blackout to Control…

139 60 Comments 346 Shares

#17

Coconut Health
January 28 ·

Did Bill Gates & World Economic Forum Predict Coronavirus Outbreak? Will There be an Internet Blackout to Control Information?

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HEALTHIMPACTNEWS.COM
Did Bill Gates & World Economic Forum Predict Coronavirus Outbreak? Will There be an Internet Blackout to Control…

34 6 Comments 55 Shares

#18

Raw Food Revolution
February 24 at 9:45 PM ·

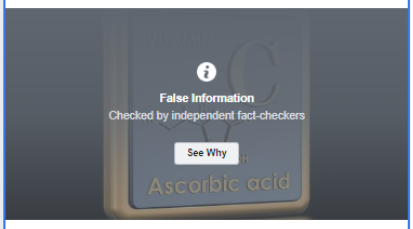
Very interesting article.....you know, doctors could completely pass over this proven life-saving treatment because it is too inexpensive. Make sure you are in the know incase you need it.

HEALTHNUTNEWS.COM
Vitamin C Works for Sepsis. Will It Work for Coronavirus?
Sepsis is a life-threatening condition triggered by aN infection that causes…

121 22 Comments 98 Shares

#19

Golden Needle Acupuncture, Herbal & Medical Supplies
January 28 ·



See Link

HEALTHIMPACTNEWS.COM
Vitamin C Protects Against Coronavirus
The coronavirus pandemic can be dramatically slowed, or stopped, with th…

85 1 Comment 185 Shares

Like Comment Share

Most Relevant

Write a comment…

Press Enter to post.

ITALY: ANTI-IMMIGRATION AND SALVINI SUPPORT

In Italy, there are two features that are significant in the spread of misinformation.

The anti-immigrant discourse

Several pages are explicitly anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim and there are many coronavirus news stories related to anti-immigrant topics and sentiment. These stories are then spread on a much broader spectrum of pages.

The most widely spread news story in Italy during the period of investigation was the below story about two Italians caught on a sailboat off the coast of Tunisia, who were put in quarantine, while 'Italy receives boat refugees carelessly'. The link to VoxNews.Info (an anti-immigrant website that has published coronavirus misinformation but bears no relation to the American Vox) was posted by a page called 'No Islam Italia' and was shared more than 10.000 times.

The third most shared post during the period, was one linking to the same story. This time, the link was shared by an unofficial page dedicated to people serving in the Italian army. It was shared more than eight thousand times.

Many Matteo Salvini support pages

There are several support pages for Matteo Salvini (to what extent they are officially affiliated has not been possible to determine) and these contributed to the spread of misinformation on coronavirus. In many cases, the misinformation coupled with anti-immigrant stories. They typically shared stories from FoxNews.Info and Stopcensura.info that Newsguard describes as "A news website with an undisclosed anti-immigrant agenda that frequently publishes false and misleading information". The links to stories from Stopcensura.info were almost all removed from the pages (possibly by Facebook's moderation teams).

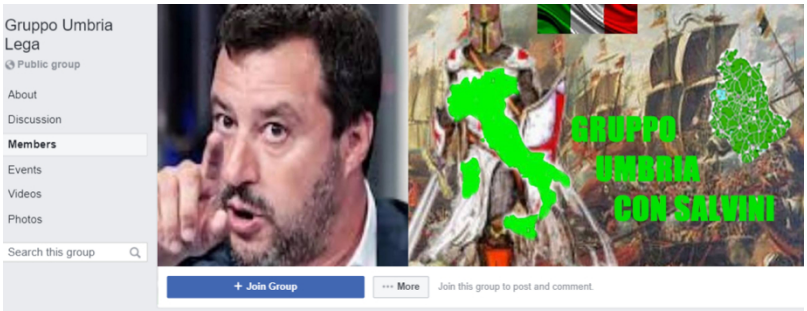
#23

MATTEO SALVINI, E GIORGIA MELONI PER UN ITALIA SICURA E STABILE!
Public group
About
Discussion
Members
Events
Videos
Photos
Files
Search this group
LEGA SALVINI
PREMIER
+ Join Group
More
Join this group to post and comment.
Members 14,457
Find a member
English (US) · Dansk · Polski · Español · Português (Brasil)

#24

Salva l'Italia con Salvini
Public group
About
Discussion
Members
Events
Videos
Photos
Search this group
+ Join Group
More
Join this group to post and comment.
Members 7,862
Find a member
English (US) · Dansk · Polski · Español · Português (Brasil)

#25


Gruppo Umbria Lega
Public group
About
Discussion
Members
Events
Videos
Photos
Search this group
GRUPPO UMBRIA CON SALVINI
+ Join Group
More
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#26

Dalla vostra parte
Public group
About
Discussion
Roberto's post
Members
Events
Videos
Photos
Files
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#27

Matteo Salvini per tutti gli Italiani
Public group
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Discussion
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LEGA
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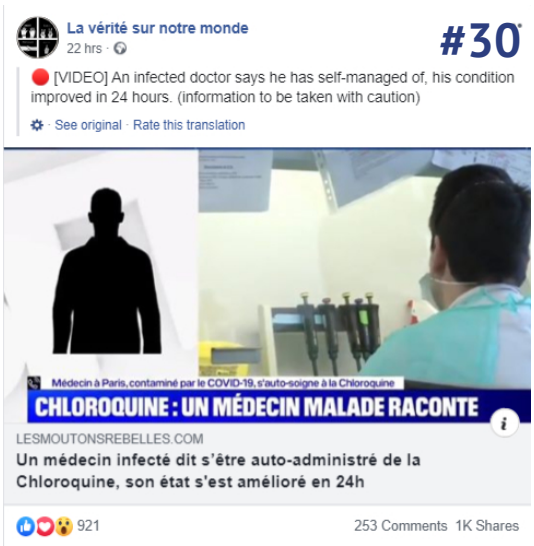
FRANCE: CONSPIRACIES ABOUND

Misinformation in France is in large part spread by several, commercially driven conspiracy sites, many of which have unclear ownership structures and extremely low credibility.

The page 'La verité sur notre monde' (The truth about our world') has a following of close to a million followers and is responsible for 11 out the 30 most widely shared posts during the period in France. The pages are linked to lesmoutonsrebelles (rebel sheep) that according to NewsGuard regularly publishes conspiracy theories and false information on coronavirus and other topics.

They have posted several stories on the use of Chloroquine as a remedy against coronavirus.



Additionally, there have been post about coronavirus being a biological weapon. The below three posts are all typical examples of misinformation on coronavirus as a biological weapon.

GERMANY – ANTI-IMMIGRATION AND FRINGE CONSPIRACY

In Germany, two agendas stand out, an anti-immigrant spread of misinformation and an ecosystem of smaller conspiracy pages.

Anti-immigrant spread of misinformation

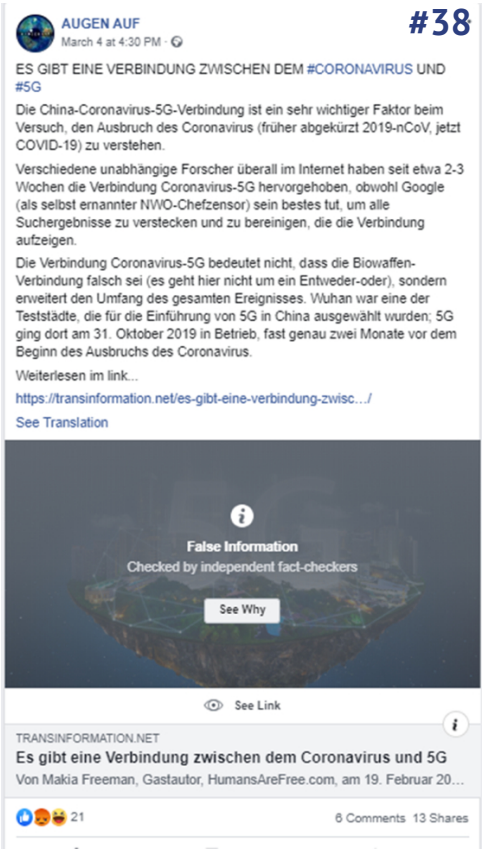
There are several German news sites that have overtly anti-immigrant attitudes and low credibility that share misinformation on coronavirus:

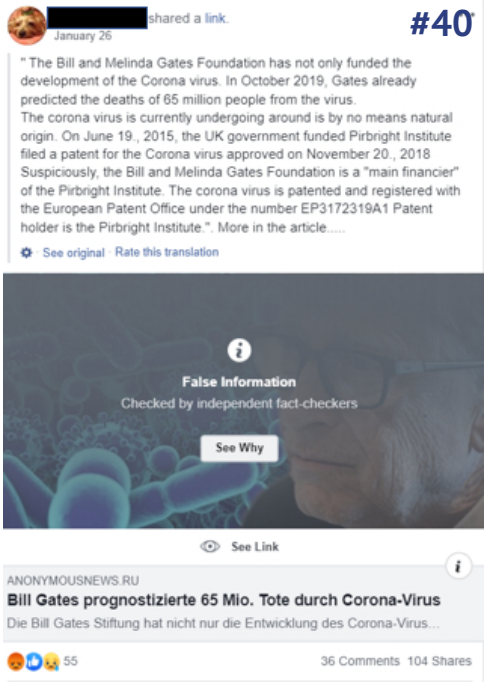
Their posts are shared by several other pages:

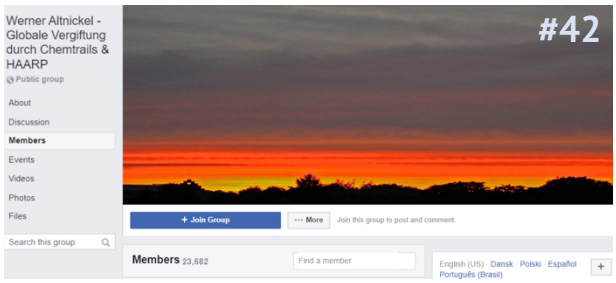
The video above shows young people presumably on Lesbos throwing rocks and being met by Police forces and teargas, and the post sarcastically states that we absolutely must bring these children to Germany in the current situation.

An ecosystem of smaller conspiracy pages

There are lots of smaller conspiracy pages that spread misinformation and conspiracy theories on coronavirus.







PERSPECTIVES & RECOMMENDATIONS

MISINFORMATION IS USED TO FURTHER OTHER AGENDAS

We set out to show how misinformation on coronavirus spread globally and to find possible explanations as to why that was.

We showed that misinformation on coronavirus began with a few limited conspiracies that were shared and spread by fringe sites. Later, misinformation became a more integral part of other discourses and pages closer to the mainstream, and it spread from one language to another.

Misinformation on coronavirus began with a few limited conspiracies that were shared and spread by fringe sites

Our findings show that much of the dissemination of coronavirus misinformation occurred when brought into different arguments on especially political and health-related views and issues on social media. Political support groups, conspiracy theorists, alternative news pages and tabloid media use misinformation to achieve their own goals – votes, support, attention and clicks. They exploit the massive interest in the issue that naturally arises during a pandemic.

Our findings also indicate that when misinformation is accepted and spread by users, it probably often happens because it is presented in a context where the user will have a strong cognitive bias towards accepting it. Simply because the misinformation post fits in the user's worldview.

Furthermore, the analysis also pointed to specific national or linguistic characteristics in the misinformation that must be taken into account in order to understand how it spreads online.

Misinformation is accepted and spread when it os presented in a context where the user will have a strong cognitive bias towards accepting it

Finally, the analysis showed that the country hardest hit by coronavirus (Italy) at the time of our data collection, also was the country where people interacted most with misinformation and information from low credibility sources. In other words, data indicates that the harder we are hit by a catastrophe like a pandemic, the more likely we become to interact with misinformation and the more effective it becomes. Hence, the insecurity of the pandemic situation itself makes us more vulnerable to conceive misinformation as reliable information.

FIGHTING MISINFORMATION

Governments around the world are fighting the spread of misinformation with various means. Our analysis indicates that there are two basic elements of misinformation that must be dealt with in different ways. The first is the actual spread of misinformation on specific platforms, and the second is the underlying causes making people more likely to accept misinformation as true. On top that, governments should also fight misinformation by targeting the goals of the described four types of pages.

We propose the below conceptual frameworks as models for governments to prevent and respond to the current and future infodemics. One very important aspect in the fight against misinformation is that it often comes to light as part of a legitimate democratic conversation. Thus, we should not go down the road of prohibiting it. Rather, we should give authorities and civil society organizations the means to engage in and qualify that conversation.

Summary table of overall recommendations for governments

	Short term	Medium term	Long term
Actual spread	Strengthen authorities' capability to communicate on social media and in polarized environments	Set up early warning systems and prioritize to address misinformation	Build civil society capacity to engage with misinformation
Underlying causes	Understand where exposure to misinformation is highest	Support independent fact checkers and social media analysts to understand misinformation	Set up educational programs to teach informational and digital literacy.

Short term

Governments and health authorities need to understand, who is most exposed to misinformation. They need to understand what parts of the digital media landscape are most inclined to spread misinformation and least likely to come across official news.

Governments must play a role in detecting these echo-chambers and cannot only rely on social media companies to tackle misinformation. Our analysis points to big national differences in the dissemination of misinformation. Governments should strengthen their

capability to communicate on social media and in polarized environments. They should also establish social media crisis operation centers on a national level that can monitor misinformation on the relevant topic. They should have all relevant organizations and experts engage with the sites and pages in question, so the conspiracies are not allowed to spread without comments from professionals.

Governments and health authorities should go to great lengths to explain the topic at hand as well as the dangers of misinformation and make sure that the information also reaches the fringes of the internet. Governments should make partnership with all relevant civil society organizations (or any membership organization that is willing and capable of reaching people who might distrust government institutions) to spread credible information to as many as possible.

Medium term

Governments should set up early warning systems that could detect increase in topic-related misinformation spread on social media. Due to the vast amount of viral misinformation, they need to be able to prioritize the misinformation they want to address. This could be done by prioritizing content that are 1) most viral and 2) most harmful.

To fight misinformation governments should financially support ecosystems of independent news organizations, fact-checkers and social media analysts to map and understand the spread of misinformation nationally and develop instruments such as labelling in terms of credibility.

Long term

Government should build the civil society capacity to detect and engage with misinformation. Democratic societies will always have an amount of misinformation on any given topic. That is the nature of a democracy. In order to fight misinformation with respect or the rules of a democracy, supporting a number of actors who can engage in the democratic discussion based on reliable information and knowledge is a better way forward than prohibiting false information.

Governments should build population-wide resilience towards misinformation through national strategies to educate people in informational and digital literacy. Governments should try to understand the underlying issues and concerns of people that engage with the pages and sites that spread misinformation.

Targeting the specific goals of the pages that spread misinformation

Page type	Goal	Measure
Political	Votes	Government officials should try to reach out to political parties and provide data and information. But in reality, authorities are at the mercy of the political parties when it comes to misinformation.
Alternative health	Support and sale of health products	Health authorities should enter into dialogue with sceptics even on their pages if the risk it presents is severe enough.
Conspiracy	Attention	Governments should accept that there will always be conspiracies but monitor their reach. Authorities should enhance their presence in formats that better reach audiences, e.g. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram.
Tabloid	Clicks	Government should inform social media platforms of click bait misinformation that comes from commercial platforms outside of Facebook.

Political Pages

Political pages that use misinformation to gather support and ultimately votes most often use polarizing tactics. This means that we should fight polarization itself. Government officials should try to reach out to political parties and provide data and information. But authorities are at the mercy of the political parties when it comes to misinformation

Alternative health pages

Alternative health pages seek support for their agendas and enhance the sales of products offered on (some of) their pages. Therefore, authorities should enter into dialogue with the users present on these pages so that dangerous or misleading guides and information is not left unanswered. Depending on the national legislation, stricter marketing laws for health products could also be a way forward.

Conspiracy pages

Conspiracy pages seek support and recognition for their world views. They are a legitimate search for meaning in a chaotic world and will always be here. Governments should not try to shut them down but rather monitor their reach and enhance their own presence on platforms like Facebook, YouTube and Instagram.

Tabloid pages

Tabloid pages that deliberately use misinformation as click bait make money in ways that endanger people and democracies. Governments should notify the relevant social media platforms of this type of page when encountered who could take them down or hamper their reach.

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